

Transylvania County Natural Area Inventory

EAGLE'S NEST/HART BRANCH Significant Natural Heritage Area

Site Significance: County
Quadrangle: Brevard

Size: 460 acres (301 in primary and 159 in secondary areas)
Ownership: Private

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES: Eagle's Nest/Hart Branch encompasses a series of north and east-facing slopes and coves above the Little River. A County-significant population of a rare wood sedge (*Carex leptoneuria*) grows in a Rich Cove Forest along with a diversity of basophilic plant species. Three locally important sub-populations of French Broad heartleaf (*Hexastylis rhombiformis*) occur within Acidic Cove Forest and in some areas of planted white pine in the site. A number of high quality natural communities including Canada Hemlock Forest, Rich Cove Forest, and Montane Acidic Cliffs add to the site's significance.

LANDSCAPE RELATIONSHIPS: The site occupies the slopes above the Little River and Hart Road and extends from Eagle's Nest Camp south to Hart Branch and the slopes above. The Little River Aquatic Habitat is 0.25-0.5 miles east of the site. Merrill Creek Ridge is just east of Eagle's Nest/Hart Branch. The site is bordered by intact forest on two sides, including conserved private lands just north of the site along Everett Road. Agricultural lands adjoin the site to the east in the floodplain of the Little River. A powerline corridor abuts the site along its southwestern border.

SITE DESCRIPTION: The site lies on the eastern slope of a long, low mountain ridge that separates Brevard and the main stem French Broad River from the Little River. Multiple coves and ridges dissect the site. Upper coves and slopes tend to be steep with rock outcrops and cliffs, while lower slopes tend to be more gradually sloped. Areas of flat relief occur in the bottom of the broad stream valleys. Stream corridors and coves are largely covered with Acidic Cove Forest, though small areas of Rich Cove Forest and a mature patch of Canada Hemlock Forest also occur. Relatively mature Chestnut Oak Forest is the predominant upland forest community. A series of cliffs occurs throughout the site on forested mid-slopes and along the side-slopes of steep coves. Some grottoes, cascades, and even small caves are present in some of the cliff complexes. Two small seeps also occur within the site and contain areas of wetland vegetation.

A mature Rich Cove Forest occurs on the mid to upper slopes above Eagle's Nest Camp. Tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) is the dominant canopy species along with other hardwoods, such as pignut hickory (*Carya glabra*), red oak (*Quercus rubra*), basswood (*Tilia americana*), and eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*). The understory is sparse, though some shrubs and vines are present, such as flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*), flame azalea (*Rhododendron calendulaceum*), Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*), and summer grape (*Vitis aestivalis*). The herb layer is diverse and is mostly comprised of basophilic species, including maidenhair fern (*Adiantum pedatum*), doll's-eyes (*Actaea pachypoda*), star chickweed (*Stellaria pubera*), marginal woodfern (*Dryopteris marginalis*),